

BEHIND THE EASEL

F I L M S

EXPRESSIVE STILL LIFE | DANIEL SHADBOLT

My Process

I begin with a drawing to 'find my compositional interest in the subject'. I like to focus on seeing colour relationships when I am painting and this subject gave me a range of greens to try to work with.

My palette consisted of Titanium White, Genuine Naples Yellow Light, Cadmium Yellow Pale, Aureolin Yellow, Indian Yellow, Cadmium red, Alizarin Crimson, Cobalt Blue and Viridian. Although I often use colours by other brands such as Winsor and Newton Artist's Oils and Old Holland, most of these colours used on the day are Michael Harding Oil Paints. As for brushes I use synthetics, sables and hogs. Most of my sable brushes are rounds in shape, and my favourite hogs are Raphael Paris Classics (long flats) and Escoda (rounds).

Painting in the studio is an ongoing process where in the course of a day a new picture might come together within a few hours while a couple of touches accumulate on another painting which has been 'dragging its heels' for a few months. I don't think of 'finishing' a picture. I will wait, when I don't know what to do. I focus instead on my energy level and what it requires. If my interest wanes then I will work on a different picture. Because of this method, most painting days will involve looking at and potentially working on several pictures.

The challenge of painting is that in every day you paint you have to begin somewhere. Until you do, you are aware of having NOT painted. The commitment to painting is a continuous challenge. I think I accept this challenge because of the feeling of movement that is possible within the process. Over time my 'stopping process' has become calmer and slower. It is a 'slowing down' I think because of the necessity of judging the impact of the additional brush marks. I question the application of the paint to the point where I'm asking if it is actually necessary. The process must involve a sort of compulsion in the activity itself. A need to paint. Finishing a picture is an attempt to predict how you are going to feel about it in the future, which isn't easy.

Mark - Making

I try to hold a paintbrush as far back as I can while painting. More like holding a drumstick than a pen. I like for the capacity for a little movement and potentially some accidental touches. If a touch is accidental, your eye still edits and judges, so no mark-making can be totally unintended or uncontrolled. I like to use a variety of brushes, and will often disrupt a mark with a cloth or palette knife in order to agitate or calm the effect. I also spent a long time in the preparation side of things. I often re-prime with oil primer over a picture that I

didn't wish to keep. If I will re-prime, especially upon a board, then I will make sure that I have sanded back the thicker areas of paint, so as to make the application of fresh paint a little smoother.

Colour relationship

My aim with this painting was for the light and the colours of the subject to come through in the picture. This process for me involved thinking about relationships of colour from the start to the 'finish'.

I try to look for a sequence of colours at any given time. The relating of colour is how I work. Making a colour statement and then modifying it for the purposes of the picture. I like to keep a chromatic palette that always features each of the primary colours and quite often a green.

The palette becomes a familiar recipe, new colours enter into the mix and take the possibilities in different directions. I have a preference for harmonising the colour which will potentially involve the use of complementary colour theory.

The drawing was fragmented into colour notes and a movement in both the observation and the handling. It is exhilarating to work with this kind of subject and while working I'm focused on the visual, scented, tactile and durational sense that it inspires in me. I love the air and fresh feeling that a new bouquet gives, it is both enlivening and lightening.

Reducing a palette gives a directness and speed to the painting process. Most of the time in painting if there is a way to simplify then it can be rewarding, fulfilling and sometimes surprising to try. With colour this can mean staying with a handful of colours and really getting to know how they interact with each other.

Two days in June

For the filming, I had prepared a set-up of flowers that I hoped would give me options, centralised around a floral bouquet in a blue green jug. I had also bought sunflowers as a back-up.

Then Nicola and Pete arrived and the day really started. The energy and professionalism that they demonstrated was inspiring to me. Knowing that I was the first painter to have been asked to feature was flattering and I remember wanting to do what I could to help make the day go well.

Pete's incredible lighting set-up recreated a dispersed light effect and solved creatively the 'problem' of my north-facing studio's lack of light. I remember well the 'it's a wrap' moment where we drank tea at the Clifton Nurseries Café in Little Venice.

When I watched back the film later, after weeks of editing, I was truly impressed with the quality. I found that the atmosphere of those two days in June was somehow captured faithfully and in a very 'watchable' way. I enjoyed the sense of structure, the clarity of the image with some wonderful artistic details and the way that an element of humour was also incorporated into the film.

Daniel Shadbolt

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